

Anorexia and Bulimia: Purity and Danger

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The bulimic woman occupies an ambivalent and ambiguous space within feminist discourse. As one-third of the holy trinity of eating disorders (anorexia, bulimia, and compulsive eating), bulimia is marked by a particular kind of omission. The figure of the anorexic, by contrast, occupies a privileged position to which all other eating disorders are compared. The anorexic body, transmitted as a visual image, carries a strong currency both within feminist theorising of eating disorders, and within wider culture. A corresponding silence surrounds the experience and representation of bulimia as it has been eclipsed by the figure of the anorexic. Representations of anorexia feed off bulimia: anorexia's presence is made possible by bulimia's absence.

This article aims to map the relationship between anorexia and bulimia through its representation in theoretical and narrative mediums with a specific focus on feminist responses to eating disorders. It explains this relationship in terms of the anxieties provoked by the experience of bulimia, and the discourses of embodiment which inform many of the arguments put forth. I theorise this relation using the work of Mary Douglas, Julia Kristeva, and William Miller on pollution and disgust. Here I argue that bulimia is repeatedly conceived as a disruptive threat on a number of levels, a threat which arises from the construction of a dichotomy between anorexia and bulimia. I then argue for a reconceptualisation of bulimia as a specific embodied habitual practice. Rethinking bulimia in terms of notions of habit and habitat drawn from phenomenology, I will argue that analyses of bulimia need to resist dualistic frameworks, such as that which understands the body only as an object and not as a subject. By considering bulimia as a practice generated and maintained by habit I aim to provide a way of combining an analysis of the cultural conditions in which bulimia is manifested with a recognition of the agency of bulimic women.

Anorexia's 'Ugly Sister'

One of the reasons for the absence of bulimia within representations of eating disorders is that bulimia, as a modern affliction, was documented as a separate illness from anorexia only in 1976.¹ Before this, bulimia had existed only as a sub-type of anorexia in which certain sufferers of anorexia manifested bulimic as well as anorexic symptoms. While there has been an enormous amount written on eating disorders in the past three decades, much of this writing either focuses exclusively on anorexia, views bulimia as a sub-type of anorexia, or tacks bulimia onto the end of an analysis whose primary object is anorexia. On those occasions when bulimia is theorised, it is invariably as an adjunct

to anorexia. Recent examples of this include Catherine Garrett's narrative-based *Beyond Anorexia*,² and the popular psychology of Peggy Claude-Pierre's *The Secret Language of Eating Disorders*.³

The dearth of material examining bulimia exists in sharp contrast to the wealth of material on anorexia, particularly that from a feminist perspective. Elspeth Probyn has recently asserted that there has been a 'feminist claiming of the anorexic body' wherein the anorexic, constructed as a victim, 'stands as proof of an unjust society'. Functioning as the alibi or screen for feminism's own will to power, for Probyn, the figure of the anorexic stands as 'the feminist emblem of powerlessness'.⁴ Troy Cooper has written that 'feminists have consistently acknowledged anorexia as an expression of the personal is political'.⁵ Cooper, like Probyn, finds that feminists share a secret, if unwilling, admiration for the figure of the anorexic, noting also that 'unfortunately, bulimia is not so easily translated into a sympathetic symbol of women's oppression'.⁶ Such admiration begs the following question: if the anorexic body possesses an emblematic status within feminism, where then does this leave the shadowy figure of the bulimic woman?⁷

Most theoretical approaches to eating disorders rely on paradigms which are more suited to an analysis of anorexia than they are to an analysis of bulimia. For instance, it is commonly argued that anorexics take up an identity with the mind in opposition to the body, such as in the words of Bryan Turner, for whom the self-starving woman makes 'an attempt at disembodiment through negation'.⁸ Anorexia is here perceived and imagined largely through visual apprehension of an emaciated and, in terms of the association between the skeletal and death, corpse-like body.⁹ Further, the anorexic body is often viewed as alienated from a feminine subjectivity. Susan Bordo sees the anorexic woman as attempting to take flight from a destiny of 'domestic femininity' through an identification with the strength of willpower which, she argues, is systematically coded as masculine.¹⁰ The achievement of—or perhaps regression to—a body lacking in feminine signifiers (breasts, hips, menstruation) is thought by Bordo, and many anorexic women themselves, as a form of freedom. Feminists such as Bordo, Susie Orbach, and Kim Chernin have argued that, in opposition to a biomedical perception of eating disorders as individual pathology, eating disorders represent a literal and symbolic rendering of the dictates of patriarchal culture.¹¹ Anorexia has been read as a form of social protest—as in Orbach's book title *Hunger Strike*—which acts out rather than speaks out against the conditions of the time. The symptoms of the anorexic, like those of the hysteric in the late twentieth century, represent for Orbach both accommodation and rebellion. For Bordo, the self-starved body is a grotesque parody of a body in compliance with feminine and body-management ideals. Self-denial and destruction through self-starvation is paradoxically a means to a new and more autonomous self-creation.

Such arguments do not, however, fit so well with the experience and representation of bulimia since bulimic experience is one of immersion in the body and its processes (a point to which I will return). The bulimic body is a much more ambiguous site, one less open to literal, visually based interpretations. Unlike anorexia, and unlike obesity, bulimia is hidden. Most bulimic women are within the (rather nominal designation) 'normal weight range' and the activity of bingeing and purging is often—though not always—completed in secrecy. This hidden aspect of bulimic existence is problematic for feminists who argue that women's bodies can be read for the reflection they give of culture. This type of reading, such as that performed by Susan Bordo in *Unbearable Weight*,¹² tends to take visual images—such as photographic advertisements—as its evidence. It is more difficult, however, to read the bulimic body as a visual body, since its status as a normal weight body renders it camouflaged, if not entirely invisible.

Bulimia is obscured in its inability to make a blatant, visual statement in the way that the anorexic's emaciated body can. The bulimic body, in terms of its outward appearance, is not afforded the same opportunity for a politically infused display. And as sight unseen, the powers of imagination figure its presence as wholly menacing.

Another reason for the lack of attention given to bulimia is that the nature of bulimic activity, and the meanings associated with it, function to contain bulimia within what some have called 'the dark side'.¹³ Worse still, bulimia has been framed as the 'ugly sister'¹⁴ of anorexia. Representations of bulimic experience are overwhelmingly structured through responses of disgust and horror that evidence certain understandings about femininity and embodiment. These responses are directly related to the hierarchical relationship between anorexia and bulimia. This dualistic relationship is constituted within language through metaphors of control and monstrosity, as well as through ideas about disgust and contamination, which litter both theoretical and narrative texts.

Theoretical examples include Susie Orbach in *Hunger Strike*, where she confines most of her attention to the anorexic, for whom she says the physical body is not the place she lives, but something she exerts control over. In the case of bulimia, however, Orbach writes that the disorder 'involuntarily grips'¹⁵ the sufferer, as if pulling her into bodily immanence. Donald Moss writes that bulimia is an example of the body presenting itself as an object, as opposed to a subjective, lived body. For Moss, the bulimic's body is a 'mechanism out of control', presenting 'powerful urges to overeat' where bulimic women experience themselves as 'standing by helplessly, watching their own out-of-control bodies eat high-caloric junk foods'.¹⁶ The bulimic experience is represented simultaneously as one of immersion in the body, and disassociation from the body, in the manner of a near-death experience. In both instances the bulimic body functions as the battleground for a fight for control involving a kind of seizure by inner or outer forces. The restraint exerted by the anorexic in her transcendence of the body is, by contrast, viewed as contained and even noble in its seemingly lofty refusal of bodily facticity.

The narratives of eating-disordered women further reflect and reinforce ideas about both control over the body and contamination of the body through the close relation posited between bulimia and anorexia. In Christine Fontana's *Stick Figure*, it is clear that when she writes of her 'total lack of control'¹⁷ that this relates specifically to her former anorexic phase. Fontana distinctly captures the different meanings of each disorder:

I am learning the hard way that that is the difference between the two:

Anorexia = achievement, self-sculpture, pride

Bulimia = disgust, loss of control, battle, abuse. (Italics in original)¹⁸

In *Wasted*, Marya Hornbacher presents the relation between anorexia and bulimia as one in which bulimia contaminates the purity of anorexia. She writes:

When I got treatment the first time, I was not one of the emaciated ones. I was definitely slim, far thinner than is normal or attractive, but because I was not visibly sick, the very picture of sick, because I did not warrant the coveted title of Anoretic [*sic*], I was embarrassed ... Bulimia, of course, gives in to the temptations of the flesh, while anorexia is anointed, is the complete removal of the bearer from the material realm.¹⁹

In *Stick Figure*, Fontana writes that when she was in her 'bulimic phase' she would:

think of how beautiful it felt to be anorexic, how safe it was, how much love I had ... remembering the way Cathy hugged me in front of the heater ... She

doesn't hug me any more. They all just attack. They stopped loving me when I stopped dying.²⁰

Such descriptions perpetually class the bulimic body as abject in relation to the anorexic body. Bulimia, for Hornbacher as well as Fontana, signifies all that is unattractive and unlovable, lacking in the high status attributed to the figure of the anorexic. Furthermore, for both Fontana and Hornbacher, bulimia's immersion in 'the material realm' is something repulsive. Commenting on the concern of her friends at boarding school, Hornbacher considers the dangers and connotations of her condition:

I wasn't that thin. There were people far thinner than me, and that was all there was to it. I mean, we all know the dangers of starving, but bulimia? That can't be that bad. It's only bad when you get really thin. Who worries about bulimics? They're just gross.²¹

Bulimia is viewed as a less ambitious way of being, a more mundane, or perhaps pragmatic, acceptance of the body as something which can never be left behind or transcended. This acceptance is prevented, however, since anorexia is sanctioned as the morally, as well as socially, superior illness.

The relation between anorexia and bulimia finds a parallel in Susan Sontag's comparison of tuberculosis and cancer, where she finds that while tuberculosis is associated with a spiritualised, aestheticised body and a lyrical, romantic death, cancer 'reveals that the body is, all too woefully, just the body'.²² The 'tubercular look', Sontag writes, was considered attractive in that it was 'a mark of distinction, of breeding',²³ articulating a modern idea of individuality. Similarly, in anorexia we find another form of the pale and interesting 'glamorous to look sickly' self promoted as an image.²⁴ This image is an almost ethereal one, such as Aimee Liu writes in *Solitaire*: 'I can almost get away from the trap of my hunger, my schedule, my emotions, my damned compulsions ... I wish I could get out of my body entirely and fly!'.²⁵ Such a flight is even less possible for those with bulimia, however, as Hornbacher writes:

Bulimia acknowledges the body explicitly, violently. It attacks the body but does not *deny*. It is an act of disgust and of need ... The bulimic finds herself in excess, too emotional, too passionate. This sense of excess is pinned to the body ... There is a sense of hopelessness in the bulimic, a well-fuck-it-all-then, I might as well binge. This is a dangerous statement, for the bulimic impulse is more realistic than the anorexic because, for all its horrible nihilism, it understands that the body is *inescapable*.²⁶

There is a suggestion here that the bulimic woman accepts the body—albeit reluctantly—in a way that the anorexic women cannot, in that the body can never be transcended, that it is, in fact, 'just the body'.

Unlike the anorexic body, the bulimic body engenders no such romanticisation, provoking not only repulsion, but also horror. In Louise Roche's *Glutton for Punishment*, the bulimic state is described as: 'The horror of being out of control' as Roche persistently tries to defend herself against what she terms 'my disgusting, mad life'.²⁷ Bulimia is even referred to at one stage as 'the monster'.²⁸ In Wendy Harmer/Sancia Robinson's play *What is the Matter with Mary Jane?*, bulimia is similarly figured as a 'Beast' set loose after years of keeping hunger under control through anorexia.²⁹ Such metaphors of monstrosity indicate a fear of the body as an entity over which we have little sovereignty. Such a body is literally alien to the self-contained, clearly delineated contours of the anorexic body.

From these narrative examples we can see how bulimia threatens to contaminate anorexia through its association with the repulsive, the disgusting, the out-of-control and, in the final instance, the very materiality of the body. I now turn to some ways of theorising these aspects of the anorexia/bulimia relation.

Defilement and Disgust

Mary Douglas's structural theory of pollution states that things become polluting or dangerous by virtue of being out of place, of not fitting in with a particular cultural order of things.³⁰ Polluting substances—such as those relating to body fluids and food taboos—are set aside as dangerous in order to reinforce social structures, and to express the ideal order which fear of transgression guards against. Her first and most well-known example concerns dirt, which we might see as essentially disorder, but of which there is no absolute form—it is merely 'matter out of place' that offends against order.³¹ In this framework, the ideal order of any society is guarded by pollution beliefs that threaten those who would dare transgress.

The disgust which follows such transgression, as William Miller notes, attests to the importance of tightly controlled boundaries, both in terms of social control, and the psychic order, given that disgust is always accompanied by ideas of danger and defilement.³² Miller supplements Douglas's ideas by asserting that it is not only matter out of place that offends order, but matter in flux, matter whose movement eludes the grip of fixed structures.³³ In terms of bulimic activity, it is clear that the movement involved in both consuming large quantities of food and then emptying them out again is constitutive of the horror indicated in narratives of eating disorders. Bulimia involves the movement of bodily matter, matter which is then regarded as out of place, and thus threatening to established boundaries of the body and of the self.

The form of embodiment exemplified by bulimic practice transgresses the borders of what Julia Kristeva, in her theorisation of the abject, would term the 'clean and proper body'.³⁴ Building on Douglas's ideas, Kristeva introduces the psychic element of abjection to describe the process by which the subject comes to enter the realm of language through rituals surrounding toilet training, cleanliness, and eating, in which the infant comes to define its own boundaries. Interestingly for this discussion, Kristeva identifies the first form of abjection as that of oral disgust: 'Food loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection.'³⁵ Rejection of the parental offer of food is also the rejection of the mother's body. When rendered fluid and hence menacing via 'uncontrollable' material urges, the boundary zone of the body provokes intense anxiety, as is highlighted in reactions to bulimia and anorexia. Such anxiety reveals the significance of marking off bodily substances—as representative of the mother and pre-identity—as separate and alien to the self.

The fact that the majority of those who practise bulimia are female implies that this sanctioning is also intimately connected to cultural representations of femininity. The bulimic body, as an abject body, is the underside of a compliant and passive femininity most obviously signified by 'eating lightly'³⁶ and lady-like behaviour around food. As such, the bulimic body marks the site of a disruption to a dominant discourse of femininity defined as passive, restrained, and lived-for-others.

The idea of bulimia as the movement of matter holds particular relevance if we see it in Kristevan terms, that is, as a ritual through which the subject returns to the source of her identity only to reject it. Through bulimia as ritual the self is protected from the abject through a re-enactment of the original experience of the abject and the separation

from the mother. Through bingeing, an overwhelming immersion in food—symbolic of the connection with the mother's body—constitutes a return to the symbolic realm, and a momentary dissolution of identity. The purge encompasses not only a response to the anxiety this causes, but a refusal of the body's separate clearly delineated form, rendering the body's boundaries fluid. This fluidity is not, however, a clear innocuous flow, but rather a sticky, viscous substance which provokes revulsion.

Douglas, drawing on Sartre, speaks of treacle as an example of a substance that is half way between a solid and a liquid, an ambiguity reminiscent of the abject status of bulimic fluid:

It is unstable, but then it does not flow ... Its stickiness is a trap, it clings like a leach; it attacks the boundary between myself and it. Long columns falling off my fingers suggest my own substance falling into a pool of stickiness. Plunging into water gives a different impression. I remain a solid, but to touch stickiness is to risk diluting myself into viscosity.³⁷

The threatening nature of bulimia can be located in the fluidity (of the body's boundary, of the contours of the self) produced by the practice of bulimia, a fluidity that disgusts and threatens not only because it is fluid but because it is a fluid that seeps and clings. The process of redrawing and reordering one's boundaries is not clear cut, and the threat of touching this symbolic boundary seems to be one which pervades all responses to, and representations of, bulimia.

Imagining Bulimia Otherwise

The relationship played out between anorexia and bulimia is framed against the backdrop of our Western dualistic philosophical heritage. In this familiar scenario, anorexia lines up with the pure strength of the mind, while bulimia, by association, is aligned with the impure, threatening body. The anorexic body is seen as the pure body of spirit, while the bulimic body is messy, undignified, and disruptive. That anorexia (and by subsumation, bulimia) is routinely conceptualised as the taking up of identity in terms of a disembodied mind, ignores the ways in which the experience of bulimia occupies an uneasy position within the overtly embodied activity of bingeing and purging.

There are, of course, other ways of approaching bulimia which do not begin from a state of contamination and revulsion. To begin with, bulimia needs to be considered separately, as a specific practice apart from anorexia. In order to effect this, we need to assess the limitations of the main tenet of the feminist response to eating disorders. Earlier I glossed the feminist response to eating disorders as that of an attempt to de-pathologise their status as individual illnesses. Bordo, Orbach, and many others do this by viewing eating disorders in terms of a historical and social continuum in which they occupy the extreme end of a whole range of forces which produce and define the practices in which women participate. Rather than accepting a division between 'normal' and 'disordered' women, these theorists locate anorexic and bulimic women inside a continuity of other 'normal' female practices such as dieting and gym workouts. However, while the idea of the continuum is a useful (and potentially empowering) way of thinking about eating disorders in a general sense, it does little to further theorisation of their specific modes of embodiment. As Bordo herself writes:

Feminist analysts see no firm boundary on one side of which a state of psychological comfort and stability may be said to exist. They see, rather, varying degrees of disorder.³⁸

This suggests that to live as a woman in the post-industrial West is to experience dissatisfaction with one's own body differentiated only by degree, as opposed to character or quality. As such, it forecloses upon the different meanings of each of these practices (such as the differences between anorexia and bulimia). While the continuum model does not say that all body practices are identical—a critical misrepresentation Bordo defends against—it does conflate them. As a theoretical device, the continuum provides little scope for analysing the specificity of these practices for it is within it that anorexia comes to stand as exemplar of and synecdoche for all eating disorders.

One way of imagining bulimia in its specificity is to refuse to view bulimic embodiment dualistically, which is often the case in feminist (and other) interpretations of anorexia. Bordo's lean masculine body of will in battle with the flabby feminine body of desire posits that the anorexic woman takes up an identity with the mind in opposition to the body. Orbach even asserts that the anorexic woman has an 'evident wish to disassociate herself from her body, to not be in her body or exist as a non-corporeal being'.³⁹ The bulimic sense of the body is incompatible with such a dualism since the body is not conquered in any sense through the strength of a disembodied will. Rather, the bulimic woman exists more fully in terms of her desires to eat, pushing the limits of what it is to be embodied in relation to food. The dynamics of bulimia are different from anorexia since the bulimic body is not alienated from subjectivity (as the anorexic's is purported to be).⁴⁰ To experience bulimia is to inhabit an intensely physical body, a body which is constantly expanding and contracting, effecting a change between one's self and the world. In the act of bingeing and purging, the body's integrity is ruptured, and the illusion of self-containment shattered. To experience bingeing, to feel one's stomach distend, and to induce vomiting is to inhabit a profoundly lived body.

By considering the bulimic body as a lived body which engages in habitual practices we can begin to move outside the dualism of mind and body as it is manifested within eating-disorder literature. The work of phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty addresses the notion of the lived body, or what he refers to as lived experience.⁴¹ Lived experience refers to a way of being in the world which exists as something between mind and body, of consciousness and subjectivity located spatially and temporally within the body in movement. Rather than viewing the body as an instrument through which the mind carries out its aims, of movement as a 'handmaid of consciousness', for Merleau-Ponty it is through the body's motility that we exist in the world, that we come to know the world.⁴² Revising the Cartesian co-ordinates of mind and body, where consciousness operates within the mind and is exerted through the passive machine-like body, Merleau-Ponty posits that 'in the cultivation of habit', the body 'understands'.⁴³ It is through the body's motility, its 'directional activity', as Rosalyn Diprose puts it, that our existence in the world is generated in conjunction with the projection of our own imaginary internal map of the body, our 'conceptual schema'.⁴⁴ This historical map of prior movements, experiences, and habits informs the nature of any activity undertaken. It is through this historically and socially cultivated habit that we understand our bodies since this is where our various acts are transformed into tendencies of disposition.

Diprose also writes of the importance of habitat since, while habits determine the character of our being in the world, they are never simply given but rather 'constituted through the repetition of bodily acts[,] the repetition of which are governed by the habitat I occupy'.⁴⁵ The lived body is informed by the repetition of practices governed by the habits, gestures, and norms particular to our culture and society. Judith Butler has demonstrated the ways in which the repetition of habitual processes enforces gendered regimes of power.⁴⁶ We are shaped by our habits as much as we shape the world through

them. Traditional and newly emerging forms of femininity, as Diprose suggests, create 'paradoxical habitats for women',⁴⁷ a difficulty which, as feminist theorists have argued, is expressed in the development of eating disorders. Diprose, picking up on the concept of agency at play in Butler's work, argues that we can also reconstitute ourselves through a 'change of habits'.

These notions of the lived body as constituted by habit and habitat are useful ways of thinking about bulimia. By considering bulimia as a habitual form of embodiment we can imagine bulimia in ways better suited to its movement-oriented status. By looking at bulimia as a habitual practice, as an engaged activity as opposed to a more static notion of identity, we can begin to establish a specificity and more independent status for bulimia. The notion of habit also provides a way of viewing the repetitive nature of bulimic activity as a self-perpetuating behaviour (as opposed to a disorder or affliction). Through a consideration of habitat we can retain the important connections between the cultural conditions in which bulimic habits develop and the discursive conditions through which they are articulated and given meaning. The lived bulimic body is not merely an object of disassociation, nor is it a free agent. The lived bulimic body is not an individual construction but is developed within certain habitats, habitats which are gendered, raced, and classed.⁴⁸

By considering bulimia as a habitual practice we move away from its proximity to anorexia, which is what allows the anorexia/bulimia dichotomy and the concurrent conceptualisation of bulimia as abject to flourish. Considered as a habitual practice, bulimia furthermore opens the way for alternative articulations of embodied subjectivity, departing from standard assumptions about consciousness and the body. The use of habit (as an element of the lived body) for conceptualising bulimia shifts attention away from the body as an object, and towards an idea of the body, as 'temporally located between the organic and the social'.⁴⁹ Bulimia, as habitual practice, does not deny the body (as is proposed with anorexia, and bulimia by association), but reworks its embodied form in a way that disputes Cartesian dualism. Unlike anorexia's status as disembodied mind, bulimia occupies a more uneasy position within the overtly embodied activity of bingeing and purging. Bulimia exemplifies different pulls within the subject: one towards taking in, filling in, and excess, the other towards expurgation and the restoration of restraint. The loss of control which bulimia signifies—its threatening monstrosity—could also be viewed as a resistance to the body of denial through an ambivalent bodily practice.

While not wanting to burden the bulimic body or the figure of the bulimic woman in the same way that feminism has oversignified anorexia, a feminist encounter with bulimia need not be one of repulsion. A feminism that can get closer to, and not be repulsed by, a body that refuses the stubborn Cartesianism it so passionately protests against, may find a more challenging mode of embodiment. Within bulimic practices we find a form of re-embodiment which cuts across the lines which constitute borders around bodily experience, lines such as: mind/body, interior/exterior, abject/proper, and matter/form. The 'loss of control' indicated by bingeing can be viewed as a resistance that, while cancelled out somewhat by subsequent purging, is nonetheless still a resistance to the disembodied status of anorexic subjectivity. The bulimic body is but one of a number of bodies that could be drawn upon in the desire to move towards less restrictive corporeal habitations.

NOTES

1. Marlene Boskind-Lodahl, 'Cinderella's Step-sisters: A Feminist Perspective on Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, no. 2, 1976, pp. 342–56.

2. Catherine Garrett, *Beyond Anorexia: Narrative, Spirituality and Recovery* (Cambridge University Press) Cambridge, 1998.
3. Peggy Claude-Pierre, *The Secret Language of Eating Disorders* (Bantam Books) Sydney, 1997.
4. Elspeth Probyn, 'The Taste of Power' in Jenna Mead (ed.), *Bodyjamming: Sexual Harassment, Feminism and Public Life* (Random House) Sydney, 1997, pp. 151, 154.
5. Troy Cooper, 'Anorexia and Bulimia: the Political and the Personal' in Marilyn Lawrence (ed.), *Fed Up and Hungry: Women, Oppression and Food* (The Women's Press) London, 1987, p. 185.
6. Cooper, 'Anorexia and Bulimia', p. 186.
7. The reader may notice my repeated use of the terms such as 'bulimic women' and 'bulimic practice' throughout my discussion. The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, this is a response to, and against, those texts which label women as 'bulimics' (or 'anorexics') since this term (and its repetition) carries diagnostic criteria which function to isolate, dehumanise, and devalue other aspects of bulimia not related to identity. For 'the bulimic', like 'the anorexic', as Matra Robertson in *Starving in the Silences: an Exploration of Anorexia Nervosa* (Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1992, p. 54), has argued, has become a 'totalised object' loaded with discursive meanings. Secondly, I want to denote gender, since this article is concerned primarily with women who practise bulimia. While men also practise bulimia, the meanings that bulimia carry for men, I would suggest, are quite different, and as such remain outside the scope of this article.
8. Bryan S. Turner, *Regulating Bodies: Essays in Medical Sociology* (Routledge) London, 1992, p. 221.
9. I invoke this corpse analogy with some reservation since the appearance of skeletal features need not necessarily be that which signifies death, although this association is a customary one. The common conception of anorexia as a disembodied subject position makes such an association. A thin and skeletal appearance could equally be experienced and interpreted as embodied in that it highlights the interior structures of the body. To read only external fleshiness as 'body' and lack thereof as absence renders the body as two dimensional and participates too keenly in the Cartesian opposition between mind and matter.
10. Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and The Body* (University of California Press) Berkeley, 1993.
11. Susie Orbach, *Hunger Strike: the Anorectic's Struggle as a Metaphor for Our Age* (Faber & Faber) London, 1986; Kim Chernin, *The Obsession: Reflections on the Tyranny of Slenderness* (Harper & Row) New York, 1981; and Kim Chernin, *The Hungry Self: Women, Eating, and Identity* (Harper & Row) New York, 1985.
12. Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, *passim*.
13. Geoffrey Cannon, *The Politics of Food* (Century) London, 1987, p. 284.
14. Mira Dana and Marilyn Lawrence, *Women's Secret Disorder: a New Understanding of Bulimia* (Grafton Books) London, 1988, p. 22.
15. Orbach, *Hunger Strike*, p. 15.
16. Donald Moss, 'Obesity, Objectification, and Identity: the Encounter with the Body as an Object in Obesity' in Drew Leder (ed.), *The Body in Medical Thought and Practice* (Kluwer) Dordrecht, 1992, pp. 86-7.
17. Fontana, *Stick Figure*, p. 231.
18. Fontana, *Stick Figure*, p. 75.
19. Marya Hornbacher, *Wasted: a Memoir of Anorexia and Bulimia* (HarperFlamingo) New York, 1998, p. 153.
20. Christine Fontana, *Stick Figure: a Personal Journey Through Anorexia and Bulimia* (Hill of Content) Melbourne, 1995, p. 169.
21. Hornbacher, *Wasted*, p. 133.
22. Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux) New York, 1977, p. 18.
23. Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*, p. 29.
24. Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*, p. 28.
25. Aimee Liu, *Solitaire: a Narrative* (Harper & Row) New York, 1979, p. 141.
26. Hornbacher, *Wasted*, p. 93; emphasis in the original.
27. Louise Roche, *Glutton for Punishment* (Pan) London, 1984, pp. 72, 91.
28. Roche, *Glutton*, p. 78.
29. Wendy Harmer, *What is the Matter with Mary Jane?* (Story by Sancia Robinson) (Currency Press) Sydney, 1996, p. 30.
30. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: an Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (Routledge) London, 1966.
31. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 2.
32. William Ian Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust* (Harvard University Press) Cambridge, MA, 1997, p. 5.
33. Miller, *Anatomy of Disgust*, p. 106.
34. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection*, Leon S. Roudiez (trans.) (Columbia University Press) New York, 1982, p. 71.

35. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 2. Referring to a time when the infant is not psychically separate from the mother/other, Kristeva views this first experience as one which simultaneously rejects and constitutes identity:

nausea makes me balk at that milk cream, separates me from the mother and father who proffer it. 'I' want none of that element, sign of their desire; 'I' do not want to listen, 'I' do not assimilate it, 'I' expel it. But since food is not yet an 'other' for 'me', who am only in their desire, I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish *myself*... During that course in which 'I' become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit. (p. 3; emphasis in the original)
36. A study on women's eating behaviours by DeAnna Mori *et al.* found that women restrict their food intake in order to enhance their feminine identities, when 'motivated to present themselves in a feminine light' ('Eating Lightly' and the Self-presentation of Femininity', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 53, no. 4, 1987, p. 693). Eating lightly, the paper suggests, functions as a strong social indicator of a woman's 'feminine' qualities.
37. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 39.
38. Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, p. 61.
39. Orbach, *Hunger Strike*, p. 88.
40. I say 'purported' here to indicate (again) that such a common conception of anorexia is not necessarily the most accurate one. My analysis of bulimia may well hold implications for an analysis of anorexia in that anorexia need not be read as a disembodied subject position. I have done so strategically as a way of highlighting an aspect of bulimic embodiment in relation to a dominant framing of anorexic embodiment.
41. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception* (Northwestern University Press) Evanston, 1963, *passim*.
42. Merleau-Ponty, *Primacy of Perception*, p. 139.
43. Merleau-Ponty, *Primacy of Perception*, p. 144.
44. Rosalyn Diprose, *The Bodies of Women: Ethics, Embodiment and Sexual Difference* (Routledge) London and New York, 1994, p. 105.
45. Diprose, *Bodies of Women*, p. 19.
46. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge) New York, 1990.
47. Diprose, *Bodies of Women*, p. 27.
48. For further elaboration on some of these points, please see my article 'The Personal and the Political: Writing the Theorist's Body', *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 17, no. 37, March 2002, pp. 55–64.
49. Tamsin Wilton, 'Temporality, Materiality: Towards a Body in Time' in Jane Arthurs and Jean Grimshaw (eds), *Women's Bodies: Discipline and Transgression* (Cassell) London and New York, 1999, pp. 48–66.